

Grammy overhaul eliminates best Native American music album category

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By Brandy McDonnell
(The Oklahoman)

The Recording Academy is implementing for next year the most drastic revamp in the more than five-decade history of its Grammy Awards, and as usual for any sweeping change, it comes with good and bad news.

The good news: The number of Grammy categories has been slashed from 109 to 78, which means the day the nominations go public might not be the most eye-straining day of my year anymore.

The bad news: In the same year the Grammys showed a real willingness to reward musical greatness from outside the mainstream — with art-rockers Arcade Fire winning best album and jazz singer/bassist Esperanza Spalding earning best new artist — the overhaul seems to particularly target music that ventures out of the middle of the road.

Yes, the academy is scrapping separate male and female vocal categories in conventional genres including pop, R&B and country. But it also is eliminating categories that honor the best in Latin jazz, classical crossovers and, of particular interest in Oklahoma, Native American music.

The best Native American album Grammy was introduced in 2001, and Oklahoma performers often earned nominations in the category.

"It's not good. We were happy that they finally opened up the category for it," said Curtis Hamilton-YoungBird, lead singer of the Pawnee-based group YoungBird. "Any musician, that's their dream, winning a Grammy."

In the 2002, YoungBird was nominated for best Native American album for "Change of Life." Twenty-one of the group's singers attended the Grammy Awards, and they took on the role of not only musical but cultural ambassadors.

"We're out here everyday living, but if you don't live here ... people still think we live in teepees and everything. We got asked questions like that," said

Hamilton-YoungBird, who is of Pawnee, Otoe and Sac & Fox heritage on his mom's side and Kiowa-Apache, Southern

category. "It is a business what they're doing, and sometimes business has to do what's in their best



Members of the Pawnee-based singing and drum group YoungBird attend the Grammy Awards in 2002. The group was nominated in the best Native American music album category, which has been eliminated for 2012. (Photo provided)

Cheyenne and Tonkawa on his dad's. "It was kind of crazy. We just told them, no, we pay rent just like everybody else."

Change raises ire of many

The "restructuring" has raised the ire of many musicians and record producers. Recording Academy President Neil Portnow told The Associated Press last week that the overhaul "ups the game in terms of what it takes to receive a Grammy and preserves the great esteem."

Starting next year, albums formerly in the Native American category will be shifted to the newly created best regional roots music category, which also will include Hawaiian, Zydeco and Cajun music.

But 2006 Grammy contender Cheevers Toppah said the Native American category already featured a jumble of musical styles, including traditional singing, American Indian gospel hymns and flute instrumentals. He and Alex E. Smith were nominated for their album "Intonation," which fused traditional Southern Plains singing with contemporary harmonizing.

The Weatherford resident believes historical significance should have preserved the

interests," said Toppah, 28, who is Kiowa and Navajo. "But sometimes I just think there are certain things you don't get rid of — like pretty much what your country is based on."

In 2007, I got the fun opportunity to inform Carnegie resident Walter Ahhaitty that his album "Walter Ahhaitty and Friends — Oklahoma Style" had been nominated in the Native American category.

"I think that when they made the category, they were probably trying to be politically correct," said Ahhaitty, executive director of operations for the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma. "I think the Grammys are more about selling records than anything else."

He wasn't surprised or outraged to hear the category was eliminated.

"It's always an honor to be nominated by anyone who shows any appreciation for what you do. It was exciting, it was unexpected," he said.

"But my music was handed down to me by my dad, so to me it doesn't matter if mainstream society ... wants to hear our music or not. We keep our music alive in our own communities, and that's all that matters to me."



Susan Supernaw



Walter Echo-Hawk

AIRC Interviews American Indian Authors, Supernaw And Echo-Hawk

The Tulsa City-County Library's American Indian Resource Center and the TCCL's Staff Association Recycling Proceeds Fund are sponsoring "Coffee and Conversations with American Indian Authors: Susan Supernaw and Walter Echo-Hawk" from 11 a.m. to noon on May 14, 2011 in the Central Library's Aaronson Auditorium located on Fourth Street and Denver Avenue in Tulsa.

The event is free to the public. Tribal member Teresa Runnels, AIRC Coordinator, said, "Featuring authors with Oklahoma ties is imperative to keeping the voices and stories of American Indians alive with today's readers. Susan Supernaw and Walter Echo-Hawk are two examples of Oklahomans who are sharing their compelling stories of great achievements through the vivid imagery of words."

The event will be filmed for C-SPAN2's BookTV weekend programming, which features segments on non-fiction books and authors, and will air in May. A book signing will follow the presentation in the Lecture Room.

Supernaw, Creek/Munsee, was the 1971 Miss Oklahoma. She was a Presidential scholar who earned an internship with House Majority Leader Carl Albert and won a National Merit scholarship. She won the 2003 First Book Award for Prose from the Native Writers' Circle of Americas for *The Power of a Name* which chronicles the first 21 years of her life from poverty, domestic strife and racial prejudice in eastern Oklahoma to being crowned Miss Oklahoma in 1971. Her new book *Muscogee Daughter: My Sojourn to the Miss America Pageant*, released in 2010, expands on those experiences.

"My book is a memoir, focusing on life in the 1950s and 1960s," Supernaw said. "It's about much more than pageants;

it's about surviving life's triumphs and defeats to fulfill a promise to one's spiritual self."

Walter Echo-Hawk, Pawnee, has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Oklahoma State University (1970) and a Juris Doctor from the University of New Mexico (1973). He currently serves as a Pawnee Nation Supreme Court Justice; Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, a brand new national and permanently endowed foundation to support Native art and culture; (3) Of Counsel, Crowe & Dunlevy, Oklahoma's oldest and largest law firm; and (4) Adjunct Professor, Tulsa University School of Law (2010).

From 1973 to 2008 he was a staff attorney for the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) and represented Indian Tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians on significant legal issues during the modern era of federal Indian law and in their quest to retain cultural rights. He was instrumental in the passage of two landmark laws: Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendments (1994).

His latest book, *In the Courts of the Conqueror*, is a look at federal Indian law and examines 10 court cases that purposely jeopardized the rights of Indians in the United States.

"Indigenous rights are never freely given-they must be demanded, wrested away, then vigilantly protected. That is the essence of freedom," he said.

Steven Woods, Associate Professor of Native American Studies and Humanities at Tulsa Community College, will moderate the event.

With thanks to John Fancher at the TCCL for his contribution.

CAMPERS, SAVE THE DATE:

NYPD Camp is celebrating its 10th Year!!!!

June 13 - 17, 2011

For American Indian youth aged 8-12 years old



Native Youth Preventing Diabetes camp is a 5 day/4 night residential camp. This camp for kids that *do not* have diabetes. Our goal is to prevent Type 2 Diabetes.

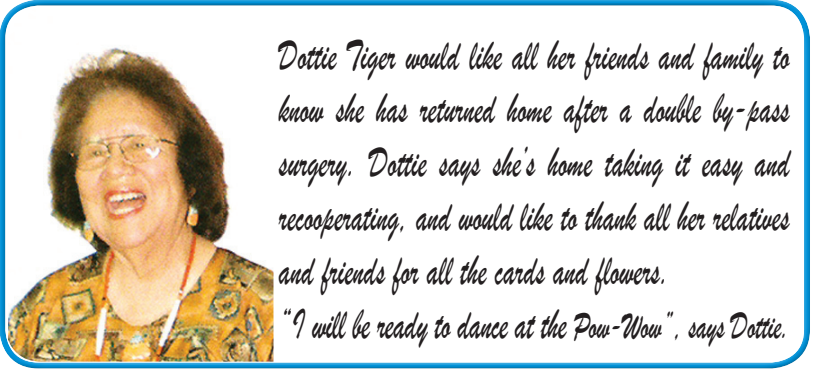
We are accepting registration packets for NYPD camp. You may pick up a registration booklet at the Merle Boyd Center.

The Sac and Fox Nation Diabetes Program is sponsoring 6 children and will transport them to camp. The children need to have a CDIB card, Black Hawk Health Center Chart and be ages 8-12 years old. Participants will be selected on a first come, first serve basis.

The NYPD Tribal coalition goal is to have 150 kids from various tribes.

We would love to have some stories from former camp participants. We love seeing the impact that our kids have on their families when they return home.

Together, We can BEAT diabetes!!!!
<http://www.nypdkids.org/>



Dottie Tiger would like all her friends and family to know she has returned home after a double by-pass surgery. Dottie says she's home taking it easy and recuperating, and would like to thank all her relatives and friends for all the cards and flowers. "I will be ready to dance at the Pow-Wow", says Dottie.



New Commissioner for Sac and Fox Nation Housing Authority, Gwen Switch, sworn by Second Chief Cheryl McClellan, Housing Liaison

